



Foreword

by

Carol M. Browner

*Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, DC*

Moving from concept to reality — that's the progress on pollution prevention we are proud to document in *Pollution Prevention 1997: A National Progress Report*.

Though it has been less than seven years since passage of the Pollution Prevention Act, the idea of reducing or eliminating pollution at its source has already gained a firm hold in environmental policy and now manifests itself in dozens of EPA programs and initiatives. After two decades of trying to control pollution at the end of a pipe, or by treating its effects, we are now operating under the principle that preventing pollution is cleaner, cheaper, and smarter than simply playing the shell game — moving contaminants around, from air, to water, to land.

But the most encouraging progress is being made beyond the offices of EPA in local communities where citizens, elected officials, business representatives, and other stakeholders are working together to find common sense solutions to their local pollution problems.

EPA has sought to encourage their efforts in a variety of ways. For instance, increasing the amount of publicly available information on toxic chemicals that are released into the environment has proved to be one of the most effective ways to reduce local pollution, because it gives citizens democracy's most powerful tool — knowledge. That's why we have expanded our Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) to include more chemicals and more industrial facilities that must report their toxic emissions.

Armed with TRI data, countless communities and industry officials have worked together to reduce and prevent pollution. Literally thousands of companies, after seeing this comprehensive snapshot of their individual facilities, have decided they must prevent pollution — and have taken immediate action to do so. Since 1988, reported releases of toxic chemicals have declined by an astounding 46 percent nationwide.

A growing number of industry leaders are viewing environmental protection not as a regulatory problem but as a business opportunity, and thus are doing a better job of monitoring their environmental costs. EPA's Project XL and Common Sense Initiative are designed to encourage businesses to improve their environmental performance, and thereby reduce their pollution of the public's air, land and water.

States and tribes, as well, are taking measures to make pollution prevention the guiding force of their environmental management programs. We at EPA are learning from their groundbreaking efforts and are proud to support them.

Through partnership efforts, thousands of organizations across America are voluntarily conserving energy and water, reducing greenhouse gases, toxic emissions, and solid wastes — and building pollution prevention into the heart of their products and their services.

This report, EPA's first national report on pollution prevention since 1991, details the progress that is being made on all levels — from EPA initiatives and industry programs to the exemplary efforts of states, universities, communities, non-profits and conscientious individuals. Across the country, from corporate boardrooms to individual house-

holds, a greater awareness of humans impacts on the environment is developing. Herein you will read about the nation's most promising examples of how Americans are preventing pollution and, ultimately, making our communities more sustainable.

To be sure, there are still many questions about the future of pollution prevention. They, too, are presented in this report.

But this report offers a great deal of hope that no pollution challenge is too daunting to be overcome by the ingenuity of the American people. I hope you enjoy reading it and that you find it a useful reference tool for developing new and innovative ways to make our environment safer and healthier for future generations.